THE CRISIS OF MUSLIM RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

THE NECESSARY SHIFT FROM PLATO TO KANT

Lahouari Addi

The Crisis of Muslim Religious Discourse

Showing that Muslim societies are facing a crisis that is more cultural than religious, this book focuses on cultural representations through which social life is experienced in the Muslim world. It brings a new theoretical framework to address the secularization process that is underway and the contradictions it entails.

This volume will arouse a new debate on secularization and the relations between religion, culture, and philosophy. The crisis Muslim societies are undergoing pertains to the culture and not to the Qurʾan to the extent that people do not have access to the sacred in itself but only for oneself, meaning a cultural interpretation of the sacred. The Qurʾan in itself is not an obstacle to secularization and modernization since any sacred text is experienced through culture. If we consider the European experience where secularization has first emerged, we see that culture has been transformed from medieval metaphysics to modern philosophy upholding a civic culture.

Discussing secularization through cultural representation, this book launches new ideas that fill an important gap in the literature on secularization. It is a key resource for any readers interested in religious studies, philosophy and the anthropology of religion.

Lahouari Addi is Professor Emeritus at Sciences Po, University of Lyon, and a member of the research center Triangle CNRS. Former member of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton (2002–2003). Professor Addi's current research focuses on Muslim Law in the light of Moral Philosophy. Author of *Radical Arab Nationalism and Political Islam* (2017).

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Translated from French by Bonnie Einsiedel

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Preface to the English edition

The debate over Islam is sensitive in societies facing secularization: welcomed by some and feared by others. The confrontation is visible at all levels of Muslim societies, sometimes triggering passion and violence. The role of scholars is to bring serenity by referring to knowledge provided by human sciences, such as philosophy, history, sociology, etc. To achieve this objective, the epistemic battle has to be won by convincing as many people as possible that religious belief is also a social fact addressed by human sciences. Leaving knowledge on religious belief to religious men leads to religion being cut off from its historical environment and its cultural and anthropological dimensions. The ulema have the monopoly over religious knowledge, which is assumed to be superior to profane knowledge. The latter had to be validated by the former. This situation prevented the creation of knowledge on humans and society. Ibn Rushd, the most famous of Aristotle's disciples, and Ibn Khaldoun, a precursor of modern sociology, had no influence on Muslim culture and did not have intellectual posterity. The absence of profane knowledge in Muslim societies created a void filled up by orientalists. Even though it bears ideological orientations, orientalism brought factual knowledge pertaining to the intellectual past of Muslim civilization by overcoming the epistemological obstacle built by repetitive commentaries of theology. Muslim theology lost its originality when it started to sacralize the works of the founding fathers instead of enriching them. The dismissal of Ibn Rushd, for whom the revelation does not contradict reason and vice versa, and the victory of Ibn Taymiyya, for whom logic leads towards atheism (*mane tamantaqa tazandaqa*) contributed to the making of a discourse built on the confusion between the sacred and opinions of the sacred.

As medieval theologians, the ulema did not understand that sacred text needs profane knowledge to renew its interpretation following historical evolution. Humankind did not stop creating knowledge after the divine revelation. In endless progression, knowledge helps to better understand the spiritual need of humanity. The sacred text does not explain itself; it is explained by philosophy and by knowledge of humans and society. Human sciences are not in competition with theology that needs them to open to society and its historical evolution. From this vantage point, Kant's contribution in philosophy and Ibn Khaldun's, Durkheim's and Weber's in sociology shed light on the relation between humanity and the

sacred. When Kant writes that man is an end in himself, he helps to avoid religious alienation. When he writes that science is unable to demonstrate the existence or the inexistence of God, he does not despise the belief in God. He only says that science is limited and its subject is different from the subject of religious ethics. *Pure* reason, as means of science, and *practical* reason, as an instrument of ethics, do not have the same theoretical vocation. The separation between the two reasons is not meant to dismiss religious values. Kant writes: "It is morally necessary to admit the existence of God" (*Groundworks of the Metaphysics of Morals*). It is because the two reasons have been conflated that medieval Christianity collapsed and Muslim religious discourse cut itself off from historical reality.

This book addresses the crisis of Muslim religious discourse that was, up until the 19th century, consistent sociologically with traditional society and philosophically with the Platonic perception of human existence. Despite the fact that he was not formally acknowledged by orthodoxy, Plato is the philosopher who has had the most influence on Muslim culture. His conception of life has been adopted by the élite and, through Sufism, by millions of believers eager to get in touch with the supra-sensible. The ulema were opposed to this utopia, but they had to deal with it. They reached an agreement with the Sufis thanks to al-Ghazali, who surrendered himself to the Neo-Platonist mystic. Ibn 'Arabi, the Sufi master, was called Ibn Flatun (Plato's son). Suhrawardi, who inspired theosophy and Shiite gnosis, was sentenced to death for considering Plato to be a prophet like Moses, Jesus ,and Muhammad. Shedding light on the past intellectual debates that opposed different currents of thought, and on the metaphysics they refer to, could be useful in overcoming the medieval interpretation in which the religious discourse is trapped. This book wants to address this task.

I would like to thank James Whiting for the acceptance of the book proposal, as well as Oliver Leaman for welcoming the book in the Routledge Studies in Islamic Philosophy Series. I am grateful to the reviewers who helped to improve the manuscript. I am, however, the only one responsible for any of the remaining errors or misrepresentation of any author I evoked. Finally, many thanks to Bonnie Einsiedel, who translated the manuscript into English. She demonstrated an availability I greatly appreciated.

<div align="right">April 21, 2021, Rockville, Maryland</div>

Foreword

This book is the result of research that began ten or so years ago. It originated in my teaching at Sciences Po Lyon and in my research project conducted at Laboratoire Triangle, of which I am a member. Its object is Muslim religious discourse and its influence on cultural representations. This discourse is an interpretation of the Qurʾan, based on the ancient Greek thought that provided a rational intellectual foundation to monotheist theology. One of the main hypotheses of this book is that religion is necessarily interpreted in a culture, in a metaphysics. Consequently, the ongoing Muslim predicament, addressed already by the Nahda movement as early as the 19th century, is about the incapacity of the theologians to put forward a new interpretation of the sacred text. The issue at stake is not the Qurʾan, but its interpretation since there is no religion *in itself*; there is only religion for *oneself*. In other words, the sacred texts do not speak; they are spoken with regard to a culture and to a metaphysics. This is seldom acknowledged in the available literature, which encourages a deep-rooted essentialism, imprisoning the Muslim in a book-based sacredness. Despite valuable books on religious anthropology and religious sociology (Durkheim, Weber, Geertz, etc.), many books on Islam fell into the orientalist or essentialist trap. This is an epistemological question that the critical approach by Edward Said has not entirely exhausted.

I tested two of this book's main hypotheses in front of my students at Sciences Po Lyon and in conferences at the universities of Oran, Sétif and Rabat[1]. What most interested the young Muslim student audience at the conferences is the idea that religious modernity in Europe substituted consciousness for reason in the reading of the sacred text. The students thus recognized their own experience in a society where dynamics of secularization are underway, despite appearances. They were receptive to the argument that the sacred has always been interpreted and, as a result, the crisis in Muslim society is cultural.

I discussed the contents of this book's chapters with my colleagues from University Lamine Debaghine Sétif 2: Nawal Hamadouche, Noui Djemai, Nouri Dris, and Zineddine Kharchi. I thank them for listening and for their contribution in seminars in which the hypotheses of this book were presented. My friends and colleagues, Tahar Khalfoune and Mansour Kedidir, both jurists, had the courtesy to proofread the chapter devoted to Muslim law. Finally, my thanks go to Abdessamad Belhaj, who has welcomed this book in the collection that he is

overseeing for Presses Universitaires de Louvain. His feedback on the manuscript has been very valuable. It goes without saying that *I am solely responsible for any error* or omission that may exist in the book. To prepare for this work, I was able to frequent the libraries of American universities thanks to the financial support of my laboratory, Triangle UMR-CNRS. I thank its successive directors, Renaud Payre and Claude Gauthier, as well as its secretary Pascal Allais, for their support and availability.

Note

1 In Rabat, I was invited by Professor El Mostafa Chadli, who organized a conference in which I presented a paper entitled "The Religious Discourse in Islam between Reason and Consciousness". The conference proceedings were published under the title "*Les islamistes au défi du pouvoir. Discours, représentation et médiatisation*", edited by El Mostafa Chadli, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Mohammed V University, Rabat, 2016.

Introduction

The title of this book could have been "Archeology of Religious Muslim Discourse as Knowledge", echoing Michel Foucault's work showing that knowledge is not neutral historically. It is triggered by an "epistemic consciousness" linked to a social-cognitive need. In this perspective, knowledge as part of culture has psychological and social functions as far as human beings fear the mysteries of nature and of life. To overcome this fear, human beings explain the natural and social environment as they can. Any explanation is knowledge, but knowledge is not necessarily scientific; it could be ideological or religious, providing it meets the cognitive needs of people. Kept alive by social memory in the form of rational discourse from the actor's point of view, knowledge develops in a diachronic continuity with the possibility of a change of paradigm in the meaning given by Thomas Kuhn. It is in this theoretical framework that I address the issue of the Muslim religious discourse as knowledge that formed in the past, blending Abrahamic eschatology and Greek metaphysics. It thrived with Muslim theology (*'ilm al-kalam*) that, between the 8th and 12th centuries, was deeply influenced by philosophy. Later on, philosophy as autonomous intellectual activity was dismissed by theology that had a pervasive influence on cultural representations of everyday life. By giving meaning to the existence of millions of people, cultural representations reveal what is right and true and what is wrong and false.

Emile Durkheim built his sociological approach on the basis of this very concept, underscoring that it enhances social cohesion. Max Weber did not use the same expression, but his idea that values give meaning to the existence of the members of society resonates with Durkheim's approach. The two sociologists consider that the representations, or values, are the core of social life. They also constitute the object of sociology *par excellence*. The concept, however, was originally prior to these two authors; its root can be traced back to Arthur Schopenhauer, who wrote his famous book *The World as Will and Representation* in 1830. The main idea is that the human world is different from the animal order and gives rise to cultural representations that make the world meaningful. It also implies that people do not passively undergo social life. They make it, and they transform it (hence the idea of will), most often without being aware of it. Representations are not structures that imprison people deprived of their agency. On the contrary, they come from consciousness and, as such, they are subject

to change. From this perspective, culture, as a set of representations, is not an essence but a social construct obeying (or resisting) historical change. Why does culture change over time? According to phenomenologists (Husserl, 1859–1938; Gadamer, 1900–2002; Ricoeur, 1913–2005), it changes in regard to consciousness that is always consciousness of something. People become aware of certain aspects of reality that they were not aware of some time ago. Guarded by memory, culture is enriched or modified each time the consciousness is awakened. In this interplay, memory and consciousness conflate and split up with each other according to historical modifications that ultimately influence subjectivity.

In this book, I consider the religious discourse as a cultural system along with common sense, art, literature, science, etc. The study of religious experience through culture, in the meaning of Clifford Geertz, is a breakthrough since Durkheim's and Weber's works on religion. Through consciousness, culture is linked to a metaphysics that provides the feeling of rationality and conformity with God, with nature and with ethics. Metaphysics naturalizes human life and humanizes nature on the basis of norms that found the social bond. This perspective is consistent with the approach of the construction of social reality that prevents the essentialization of culture. It helps the researcher to study religious life through the cultural representations of believers. This book deals with the cultural representation in Muslim societies going back to the past, as far back as the making of early theology and the influence of Greek metaphysics. We need to bear in mind that Greek philosophy provided Judaism, Christianity, and Islam with the Logos used by theologians to *rationally* defend the divine revelation. The Abrahamic eschatology matched the Platonic metaphysics that took root in popular religion through Sufism nurtured by Neo-Platonism. True life is that of the hereafter, preceded by the ephemeral and corruptible life on earth. This cultural representation is built on Greek metaphysics that served theology as rational discourse. Devaluing earthly existence, this paradigm is constructed on moral Manichaeism and postulates that humans are a means to carry out celestial Good and to prevent earthly Evil. Furthermore, it feeds the hope of saving the soul that will join eternal life after death. In this way, these cultural representations are consistent with the Platonic paradigm on which Muslim theology is built. "Christianism is Platonism for the masses", wrote Nietzsche. This applies to Islam and more profoundly for Sufism that Islamism politicized.

Islam shared biblical eschatology with Christian Europe, although this kinship has been veiled by ongoing conflicts that led to the image of radical otherness in the Middle Ages as well as in modern times. Islam and Christian Europe also share the Greek heritage that Muslims endorsed on the basis of its convergence with Abrahamic monotheism. Ibn Rushd expanded Aristotelian rationality and Ibn Sina built his thought on Platonic dualism. Both Aristotelian positivism and Platonician essentialism have been a part of Muslim learned culture, even though the orthodoxy imposed the primacy of divine revelation over human reason and was suspicious of the excess of Neo-Platonic ecstasy. Starting from the 16th century, Islam and Europe diverged intellectually with regard to Greek philosophy. Following the scientific discoveries of Galileo and Newton, the Aristotelian

knowledge was ruined. It triggered a new philosophy that replaced Plato's and Aristotle's. Muslim culture was affected by such a crisis because religious discourse did not build its legitimacy on the profane knowledge as did the Catholic Church. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's doctrine of knowledge imposed the principle of divine freedom with regard to Aristotelian causality. So, any scientific discovery is accepted by the Muslim theologians as evidence of the greatness of God. If there are natural rules, al-Ghazali writes, it is because God wants it to be so, and he can suspend these rules at any time. If fire burns wood, it is because God established this causality, and it is not a necessity independent from his will. This anti-Aristotelian stance permitted Muslim theology to be intellectually independent of profane knowledge. It is the reason why the collapse of Aristotelian knowledge in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages neither affected nor challenged the intellectual authority of Muslim theology over culture. A 17th-century Muslim theologian, knowing Galileo's work, would say, while remaining loyal to al-Ashʿari and al-Ghazali, that if the earth turns around the sun, it is because God wants it so. He would also say that God can make the sun turn around the earth. The intellectual autonomy of Muslim theology with regards to profane sciences protected it from the evolution of these very sciences.

Scholars interested in the secularization of Muslim societies have put forward many different approaches, highlighting such issues as colonial past, underdevelopment, contradictions in the nation-state building process, and exogenous modernization. There is certainly relevance behind these theoretical perspectives, but it seems that there is a path that has been overlooked: that of today cultural representations, at odds with the "sociological secularization" that Muslim societies are undergoing. The emergence of the autonomy of the individual, the aspirations of women to be present in the public sphere, the challenge faced by father's authority in the domestic sphere, the emergence of the nuclear family model, the decline of the ethos of sainthood, and other factors are what I call "sociological secularization". This sociological secularization is in search of representations consistent with the sacred and the need to believe in God. Secularization is about the cultural representations and not about the sacred text. The expression "secularized religion" has no meaning as far as we do not secularize God; however, we secularize culture. The Muslim predicament is about culture and not the Qurʾan. The hardship that Muslim societies are undergoing pertains to the interpretation of the Qurʾan and not to the Qurʾan to the extent that people do not have access to the sacred in *itself* but only for *themselves*. In contradictory ways, people express a need to change the current cultural representations. The Salafists put forward the idea to go back to the Ancestors to regenerate their "valid" interpretation of the sacred text, while reformism is in search of a new interpretation consistent with the sociological change.

The exogenous modernization that followed the European expansion and its social and economic consequences led to an ideological backlash. The religious discourse has been used as an ideological resource to oppose the foreign domination as well as the secularization it unleashed. The latter is accused of undermining the Muslim identity. From this vantage point, the religious men reject any

attempt at a social thought that contradicts their discourse. In 1925, Sheikh Ali Abdel Raziq was disowned by the university of al-Azhar where he was trained as a religious scholar. His supposed mistake was to have written a book on political authority in which he called into question the religious legitimacy of Muslim monarchies. In the 1990s, the Egyptian scholar Hamid Abu Zayd had to leave his country under pressure from his colleagues, who accused him of debasing the Qurʾan by using a historical approach to explain the sacred text. These two condemnations at the beginning and at the end of the 20th century show that the religious discourse exerts control over profane knowledge, fearing that it influences the cultural representations of the population. It asserts itself by overseeing the profane knowledge of history, sociology, linguistics, and philosophy. At the same time, in doing so, it deprives religious thought of building a modern theology, as far as the development of theology depends on philosophy and other human and social sciences.

In the 18th century, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabism, stated that any knowledge that did not originate from the Qurʾan was illicit. This affirmation was an intellectual regression with regards to the teachings of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, who had not dismissed scientific knowledge; they declared that the causality put forward by Aristotle was not above divine will. Wahhabism would have cut off the Muslim world from the sciences developed in Europe if it had not been for Muhammad Abduh, the religious leader of al-Nahda in the 19th century. Indeed, Abduh invited Muslims to accept the scientific discoveries carried out in Europe, affirming that they were proof of divine power. He went even further by saying that, contrary to Catholicism, Islam would not have persecuted Galileo. Abduh's biggest achievement was to convince his fellow theologians that European scientific discoveries, such as electricity, the steam engine and telephone, were not the inventions of evil. Following him, the ulema did accept the scientific progress achieved in Europe, but refused the secularization of culture and of social thought. They feared losing their intellectual legitimacy among the believers, considering that knowledge about society and Humanity must develop in coherence with the teaching of the theology. In this way, today, religious discourse and cultural representations are hostile to social sciences to the extent that they explain social life by resisting the hegemony of theology. The worldview of the medieval religious discourse is at the extreme opposite of social sciences' assumption of human agency.

This book is not a philosophical essay; it is rather a reflection pertaining to the sociology of knowledge. It is a result of many years of empathic observation of social practices, analyzed from the average Muslim's point of view, and the study of many sociology, history, and philosophy books. It shows that, even if it is challenged in everyday life, the medieval religious discourse is still strong enough to impose its symbolic order and to oppose the emergence of a civic culture built on public liberties and freedom of consciousness. It is strong enough to control all forms of social thought expressed in the public sphere. This strength is political as far as the religious discourse has influence among a great number of believers. Religious men understand that their power in society is at stake, and they do not

want to lose their symbolic power. The cultural representations of the masses are their Trojan horse.

The assumption put forward in this book came into my mind when I was writing a paper on Muhammad Abduh, trying to understand the failure of the reform he wished to implement. Instead of modernizing theology, he concentrated his efforts on explaining that Islam is open to science, unlike Christianity, while refusing the separation of the sacred and the profane. Admittedly, he encouraged the rise of national consciousness, abandoned the hope of revamping the old Ottoman caliphate, and called upon Muslims to get involved in the modern economy, going so far as to make a difference between bank interest rates and the illicit usury (*riba*) forbidden by Islam. For many centuries, theologians devoted their lives to ensuring the afterlife of believers. In this chain of thinkers, Muhammad Abduh is an exception insofar as he was more concerned with the historical context of European expansion. His movement, however, did not have enough strength to create a new theology, as did Luther in Europe some centuries earlier. Today, the Muslim world is paying the price of the contradictions of the Nahda movement, incapable of secularizing social thought and reforming theology. Abduh was not the reform leader that the Nahda concept of *islah* implies. The failure of his project had dramatic consequences on societies torn between an exogenous material modernization and the desire to preserve the old worldview. I assume in this book that one of the causes of the failure of Abduh is his underestimation of the role of philosophy in religious reform. He did not grasp the relationship between the old Greek philosophy and the religious discourse. So, the arrangement of the different chapters proceeds from this assumption.

The first chapter explains how Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theologies refer to Greek metaphysics to give an intellectual and rational foundation to Abrahamic monotheism. In the Middle Ages, philosophy and profane knowledge were embedded in religious culture. This explains why theologians endowed themselves with the authority to oversee profane knowledge, until this profane knowledge collapsed in Europe following the discoveries of Galileo and Newton. A new religious sensitivity emerged with Protestantism that gives more importance to consciousness than to reason. The second chapter describes the process through which Muslim theology expelled philosophy as an autonomous intellectual activity, while keeping Platonism as an implicit metaphysical underpinning of *‘ilm al-kalam*. This led to Sufism, which is a kind of Platonism for the masses, as Nietzsche put it for Christianity. Blended with the ancient Persian mysticism, Sufism blossomed with Suhrawardi's illuminism (*ishraq*) and Ibn ‘Arabi's theosophy. The mystic doctrine has its source in Plotinus, Plato's disciple, whose system unleashed a strong desire to cross the line between the human and the divine worlds. Henry Corbin, a French Islamologist, was fascinated by the ecstatic fervor stemming from the blend of biblical monotheism and the Zoroastrian tradition of Iran. Admiring the spirituality of Persian culture, Corbin did not want Islam to be interpreted in new philosophical paradigms. He considered that religion is more meaningful in Platonic metaphysics than in the Kantian one. The idea of God is, according to him, more appealing in *ishraq* and Sufism; this explains why

these doctrines gained popular support. The third chapter attempts to show how popular Sufism imposed itself upon the orthodox Sunnite doctrine built on cold reason. For many centuries, Muslim culture has been marked on the one hand by the rigorist *fiqh*, and ecstatic Sufism on the other one. Following the sociological transformations of the last two centuries, Sufism collapsed, but its social energy was captured in the 20th century by political Islam. The goal of political Islam is to implement the utopian project of a religious state concerned with life and the afterlife. In this perspective, it is the profane extension of Sufism; it politicizes the sacred, claiming to have the solution to save the lost souls corrupted by the materialism of the West.

Chapter 4 deals with Abduh's project to promote an epistemic transition in Muslim culture he intended to reform. He was, however, more concerned by natural sciences and technology than by social sciences that would contribute to religious reform. He thought that sciences are sufficient to build political modernity in the forms of the nation-state, parliament, elections, and citizenship. However, the religious reform that he advocated was limited to the critique of popular Sufism. He remained faithful to the old religious paradigm of al-Ashʿari and al-Ghazali. By praising positivism while defending the old theology, Abduh was respected by both the religious establishment and the secular nationalists. It explains its double filiation: on the one hand, a conservative culturalist trend that would become political Islam later on, and on the other hand, a liberal nationalism that would radicalize in the 1940s and 1950s. The fifth chapter endeavors to analyze the paradox of a contemporary Muslim society welcoming the most modern technology while being suspicious of philosophy and social sciences. The religious establishment does not object to scientific discoveries, claiming that they do not contradict the Qurʾan, as far as the laws of nature depend on God's willingness. If positivism as a methodology is accepted, the concept of human agency on which modern philosophy and social sciences are built is dismissed. It collides with cultural representations that assume, in the Aristotelian tradition, that society is the human extension of the natural order. Cultural representations are still structured by Greek metaphysics through which the religious faith is experienced. The sixth chapter sheds light on the contradictions of everyday life experienced by people who are not anymore traditional but are in search of a kind of Islamic modernity. There are more and more thinkers, writers, and journalists, who express their views on the necessity of a new reading of the Qurʾan. The future of Muslim societies hinges upon the outcome of these debates and upon the ability of the élite to put an end to the enchanted worldview contained in Platonic dualism. The seventh chapter deals with *Shariʿa*, *fiqh* and Muslim Law to emphasize that these three concepts are different. The *fiqh* is the cultural dressing of *Shariʿa*; it means that *fiqh* is a human law and not a divine law. As for the Muslim Law, it is a heterogeneous synthesis of *fiqh* with European Law. The ideological structure of the *fiqh* is not consistent with the concept of nation-state that enacts juridical rules. As a stateless law, the *fiqh* had to be modified by lawmakers of the nation-state. In the last chapter, I remind the reader that until the 16th–17th centuries, Europe and Muslim societies shared the same metaphysics and diverged later with the

emergence of modern philosophy. While Muslim culture stayed faithful to the Platonic worldview, Europe built a new one on the basis of Kant's philosophy. A secularized culture emerged in Europe and imposed itself on theology. Since then, theology has limited itself to the study of the sacred text, giving up the task of judging the consciousness of believers, of controlling science and of legitimizing political authority. It is towards such a perspective that Muslim society will be leaning. To address this issue, it would be misleading to limit our focus to the reading of old texts written some centuries ago. Instead, we need to rub shoulders in the popular streets of Casablanca, Algiers, and Cairo. On this matter, cultural representations are changing, even though this is not perceptible at first glance.

I have added an appendix pertaining to the famous controversy that pitted Carl Schmitt and Karl Löwith against Hans Blumenberg. I read Blumenberg's book *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* after I finished writing my manuscript. It gave me more confidence in my bold assumption that modernity is not the secularization of biblical concepts, but rather the passage from a social thought influenced by Plato to another social thought influenced by Kant. Modernity built its own intellectual legitimacy by breaking with Greek metaphysics. Muslim societies will not escape this same path, which is their greatest challenge today. This book attempts to contribute to the intellectual project to free Muslim culture from the old metaphysics, drawing attention to the European experience.

1 Plato and Plotinus in medieval Abrahamic theology

Understood as a worldview, medieval culture was fed into the Mediterranean by Abrahamic monotheism and Greek philosophy, which expressed a diverse set of eschatological expectations on life and death. Monotheism appeared in the space where Hellenic, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Persian cultures overlapped. Although they worshiped many deities, the Hellenic peoples of early Antiquity believed in an eschatology that divided existence into an ephemeral present and an eternal future. The idea was that the soul detached itself from the body to join the perfect world of the hereafter. The Jewish Old Testament reproduced this vision, where divine power contrasts with humanity's powerlessness. However, the novelty of the Old Testament was to unify divinities and to limit magic. The convergence between monotheism and the religions of Greek Antiquity was possible due to what they had in common, namely the distinction between an ideal divine world and its imperfect reproduction in the human world. This metaphysics reached its highest intellectual degree with the Platonic dualism that theologians used to give the monotheist narration an intellectual foundation. Platonic dualism would provide a Logos to the biblical vision, on which the sacred text would rely to justify the rationality of the belief in God. Platonic dualism was itself modified by Plotinus to make it into a mystical metaphysics that influenced Jewish, Christian, and Muslim believers. The Platonist version of Abrahamic monotheism profoundly marked religious cultures in Europe and the Middle East. It was, however, challenged in Western Europe by Protestantism which, by revaluing earthly life, lessened the tension of Platonic dualism and contributed to the birth of a secular culture independent of religious eschatology. Nietzsche attacked the Platonic foundation of Christianity, accusing the Roman Church of having maintained an illusion that made believers feel guilty and prevented them from enjoying earthly life.

Monotheism and Greek thought

There is a strong link between Abrahamic monotheism and ancient Greek metaphysics to the point that historians of religious thought wonder which influenced the other. Did Plato read the Jewish Old Testament to formulate his philosophy of the world of Ideas and the sensible world, or was his philosophy anterior

and known by Moses? Theories were formulated to respond to this intellectual enigma, but historians cannot find convincing evidence. However, there is one undeniable fact: Abrahamic monotheism and Greek philosophy share the same cosmology that responds to humankind's cognitive and ethical needs in relation to life, death, day, night, rain, sun, thunder, etc. Knowledge was accumulated to respond to these existential questions in the East (Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Persia) and in Greece, and it is easy to imagine contacts and flows that spread over several centuries, thousand years before our time. Jean-Pierre Vernant, a specialist in ancient Greece, highlights the links between the ancient philosophy and religious thought, considering that "in its fundamental features and the way it developed, Greek philosophy appears as the legacy of the Hellenic religion[1]" extended by Abrahamic monotheism, which nevertheless refused the plurality of gods. This theory was continued by Karl Jaspers, for whom "our Western idea of God springs from two historical roots: *the Bible and Greek philosophy*".[2] The German philosopher Hermann Cohen agrees, affirming that "Philo certainly endeavored beyond measure to establish unity between Plato and Moses",[3] adding that, although part of Greek philosophy was absorbed by the Jewish religion, both nevertheless kept their autonomy. "Moses became the representative of religion and Plato that of philosophy".[4]

The expression of this convergence between the cosmological structure of the Bible and Platonism began early and is found in the Hellenized Jews who were opposed by traditionalist Jews. In 40 A.D., Philo of Alexandria gave a Platonic reading of Judaism. In Alexandria, an Egyptian city and home to Hellenic culture, Jewish thinkers made the convergence between the Old Testament and Plato (Aristobulus of Alexandria, 200 B.C., Titus Flavius Josephus, 100 B.C., Philo of Alexandria, 40 A.D.). Then there were the first Christians, including John the Apostle (deceased in 43 or 101 A.D., according to historians) for whom "the Word became flesh". The Word is the Greek Logos, reason and wisdom extolled by ancient philosophy. John the Apostle, author of the Gospel, states:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God … All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. Him was life, and the life was the light of men … And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

In a similar vein, according to Justin: "Everyone who has lived according to the Logos is Christian, even if they passed themselves off as atheists, such as *Socrates, Heraclitus and their kind*".[5] If the Fathers of the Church called on Greek philosophy to support the divine message and attract believers to the new faith, this philosophy provided the conceptual framework that founded the rationality of biblical eschatology.

Even if Moses is chronologically anterior to Plato, it is in the latter that we find the rational system of monotheistic faith, echoed in the allegory of the cave. Indeed, this image of men chained up by their ignorance, only perceiving

shadows, reinforces the feeling of fragility faced with the complexity of nature. The light, the real world, the essence of things, are outside the cave, only accessible by rational abstraction. In this hidden complexity of the essence of the real, the individual is powerless if he/she does not use reason, says Plato, or faith, say the sacred texts of monotheism. In religion, the light of day and the cave's obscurity correspond, for one, to the real and eternal life, and for the other, to the temporary and illusory life. This schema provides the markers which have, up to this point, explained and interpreted the world in which the real is hidden underneath the apparent. One only has to replace faith with reason to become aware of the similarity between monotheism and Greek philosophy, which was seized upon by Jewish rabbis, Christian theologians, and Muslim *mutakalimun*. Body and soul, substance and spirit, the sensible world and imperceptible essences, etc., are concepts that correspond to the biblical cosmology where faith plays the same role as reason or wisdom. Monotheism joined this vision which, in practice, would give rise to behaviors and states of mind that would push its logic as far as possible: Idealizing heaven and devaluing life on earth.

Plato teaches that perfect Ideas are reflected in the sensible world in altered forms. The empirical world is a pale reflection of the intelligible world, or a mirror image deforming an ontological reality pertaining to the Truth (knowledge), Kindness (ethics), and Beauty (aesthetics). Plato's reasoning relates to the idea of the perfection of geometric forms, mathematics, a perfection that we never find in the empirical world. This is a rational theology where God, piety, moral duty, eternal life in the hereafter … give meaning to life. "As for the earth, our nurse", writes Plato in *Timaeus and Critias*, "winding around the axis that had been run straight through the universe, he designed it to be the preserver and creator of night and day, and the first and eldest of the gods that were created within the universe".[6] The idea of God, as monotheism teaches, is absolute for Plato, who invites the reader to imitate the perfection of essences to access divine happiness. Plato pushes individuals towards a bottom-up system, not to reach divine perfection but to draw closer to it through *reason*. Abrahamic monotheism comes from this very movement towards heaven, the pantheon where pure Intelligence – God – lives. Monotheism is in affinity with the transcendental concepts organized around a god who, additionally, created humankind in his image. And if humanity betrays this image and is not faithful to it, they are then sinners against the divine will. Adam and Eve committed the original sin, arousing the wrath of God, who condemned the first to work by the sweat of his brow, and the other to give birth in pain. This punishment was not enough to erase the fault committed; a debt must still be paid to God to express the regret for not having reached perfection.[7]

In the three monotheist religions there are, of course, currents that rejected the glorification of pagan Greek thinkers, but this does not negate the fact that Abrahamic monotheism and ancient Greek philosophy share the same metaphysics. If Plato was Judaized, Christianized, and Islamized, it is because part of his teachings can be assimilated by the Bible, the Gospels, and the Qurʾan. Many Western philosophers, from Hegel to Heidegger, emphasized the Christian

intellectual debt towards Greek thought. In an attempt to modernize Aristotle, Heidegger writes:

> The doctrines of late Scholasticism concerning God, the Trinity, the original state of man, sin and grace worked with the conceptual instruments that Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure provided for theology. But this means that the idea of human being and the *Dasein* of life, initially taken as a starting point in all the above domains of theological problems, was based on Aristotelian "physics", "psychology", "ethics" and "ontology", in which Aristotle's basic teachings were treated in a particularly selective way and worked with on the basis of a particular interpretation of them. Augustine is also decisively influential and through him Neoplatonism and, through it and to a greater degree than is commonly supposed, again Aristotle.[8]

While being interested in Aristotle, Heidegger underlines the importance of Neo-Platonism in Christian thought.

However, it is important to keep in mind that Plato's most advanced religious and mystical reading was the work of an Alexandrian pagan philosopher Plotinus (205–270 A.D.). Plotinus built a theodicy, named Neo-Platonism, very close to Christian theology. Even though there were precursors, it was Plotinus who would merge Plato's philosophy with that of Aristotle, combining it with Stoicism and adding a mysticism that would influence monasticism (Christian) and Sufism (Muslim). His writings are very close to commentaries on sacred texts, exposing the main themes of monotheist eschatology: God, soul, spirit, regeneration, the Absolute, good, evil, contemplation, grace, infinity, light, the One and Only, etc. "If, then, we said", he writes,

> that after a certain time the universe, which did not previously exist, came into being, we should in our discussion lay down that providence in the All was the same as we said it was partial things, a foreseeing and calculation of God about how All this might come into existence, and how things might be as good as possible. But since we affirm that this universe is everlasting and has never not existed, we should be correct and consistent in saying that providence for the All is its being according to Intellect, and that Intellect is before it, not in the sense that it is prior in time but because the universe comes from Intellect and Intellect is prior in nature, and the cause of the universe as a kind of archetype and model, the universe being an image of it, and existing by means of it, and everlastingly coming into existence, in this way.[9]

It is difficult to believe that such a text came from a pagan author. Plotinus aligns himself with the teachings of Plato and not with that of Jesus Christ, giving rise to a current of thought that would dominate medieval philosophy and accompany monotheist theology.

Faithful to his master's philosophy, Plotinus accentuates the religious dimension of Plato's work to which he would add mystical fervor and introspective exaltation,

transforming it into a contemplative theodicy that strangely resembles Christian eschatology as it appeared with the first Apostles. "This Universe", he writes,

> is not Intelligence and Reason, like the Supernal, but participant in Intelligence and Reason: it stands in need of the harmonizing because it is the meeting ground of Necessity and divine Reason – Necessity pulling towards the lower, towards the unreason which is its own characteristic, while yet the Intellectual Principal remains sovereign over it. The Intellectual Sphere [the Divine] alone is Reason, and there can never be another Sphere that is Reason and nothing else; so that, given some other system, it cannot be as noble as that first; it cannot be Reason: yet since such a system cannot be merely Matter, which is utterly unordered, it must be a mixed thing.[10]

Based on a reading of *Parmenides*, where Plato speaks of the three Ones, Plotinus constructs a theory called hypostasis, in which he explains that the One, Intellect, and Soul trace a hierarchized procession of intelligible reality.[11] "[T]here is first the One beyond being … then in turn being and intellect, and third comes the nature of the soul".[12] The theory of hypostasis is fundamental to Plotinus's philosophy, and it is difficult not to draw a parallel with the Trinity, through which the Christian dogma expresses the sensible world of the hereafter. Even if Plotinus modified Plato's philosophy, he did not disrupt the paradigm identified with Abrahamic monotheism.

Historians of Christian thought seem to agree that Plotinus' reading was decisive in Augustine of Hippo's conversion to Christianity.[13] It drew him away from Manichaeism and led him towards the Christian faith, which he would give dogmatic originality with regard to the Oriental Churches.[14] Augustine acknowledges his debt towards Plato and the Platonists (the former is cited 54 times in *The City of God* and the latter 40 times), writing:

> These philosophers, whom we see not undeservedly exalted above the rest in fame and glory, have seen that no material body is God, and therefore they have transcended all bodies in seeking for God. They have seen that whatever is changeable is not the highest God, and therefore they have transcended every soul and all changeable spirits in seeking the supreme.[15]

In the same book, he writes:

> Our philosophers of predilection (the Platonists) perfectly distinguished that which the spirit conceived from that which the senses attained, not removing anything from its legitimate domain, not adding anything to it, and clearly declaring that this light of our intelligences, which makes us understand everything, it was God himself that created it all. [16]

However, from Platonic philosophy, Augustine would keep only what is compatible with the Christology of the patristic Church. Augustine definitively

Christianized Plato; however, he filtered from his work anything that did not comply with the Western Church's dogma. Augustine's significance in the development of the Catholic doctrine is that he was the first to clearly distinguish what in Plato was acceptable and what must be rejected.[17] He is the one who "baptized" Plato by removing anything that conflicted with the New Testament from his philosophy. What is the difference, Augustine asks, between Platonism and Christianity? Why has Plato's thought remained a speculative theory reserved for the élite when Christ's message touched the hearts of several million people? The answer, according to him, is that the Greek philosopher only interested the literate élites, while Christ attracted millions of ordinary people searching for hope. Pierre Hadot comments on the position of Augustine when writing, "Platonism was not able to convert the masses and turn them away from earthly things, in order to orient them towards spiritual things; whereas, since the coming of Christ, people of all conditions have adopted the Christian way of life, so that a true transformation of humanity is underway".[18] What monotheism added to Platonism was the hope for a happy future life in heaven, and divine sanction for those who act unwisely and do not follow God's path. For several centuries, the Latin Church thrived on the synthesis that Augustine made between Plato and the Gospels, in a harmony that would be disrupted by Thomas Aquinas, who would then make Aristotle the central reference of scholasticism.[19]

At this stage, it is perhaps useful to draw a parallel between Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. The former integrated Greek metaphysics into commentaries on the Bible, by paying more attention to Plato than to Aristotle. He was more concerned about the city of God, where one must only meditate on the city of men grappling with the temptations of the body. This was not the case for Thomas Aquinas, more attracted to Aristotle, in whose writings he found the profane science that demonstrated divine power. Augustine is a thinker of "divine theology", while Thomas Aquinas is a thinker of scholasticism: The discipline responsible for profane knowledge. We need to bear in mind that scholasticism is not theology *per se*. Aquinas was interested in the knowledge that explains God's power in relation to the nature that he created. For this purpose, He (Aquinas) would need Aristotle more than Plato. Thomas Aquinas was delegitimized intellectually when Aristotelian knowledge collapsed after Galileo. If the Church had remained faithful to Augustine the Platonist and had not followed Thomas Aquinas the Aristotelian, perhaps Europe's history would have been different. The lesson to be learned is that Plato is a valuable asset for Abrahamic eschatology. Aristotle is less so, as his naturalism, which triumphed with Thomas Aquinas and failed with Galileo, caused theology to lose its reign over thought. If medieval Christianity collapsed, it is because it relied on Aristotle; if medieval Islam is still alive, it is because it relied on Plato, even if his presence is implicit and not explicit. The scientific discoveries of the 16th and 17th centuries would bring into question scholasticism and not the Gospels. Once Copernicus and Galileo dismissed the geocentric conception of the universe, the Aristotelian system collapsed and, with it, the teaching of Thomas Aquinas and of all scholasticism resting on a conception of the cosmos dating back to Ptolemy.

After the scientific discoveries, Greek metaphysics lost its relevance to inter-
pret the world and to provide a framework of intelligibility to nature, which would
then create a void to be filled by a new philosophy. The shift of the theocen-
tric order towards an anthropocentric order of the world had become inevitable.
Habermas describes this evolution quite well, an evolution that put the Church
on the defensive, to then abandon its ambition to exercise the monopoly over
knowledge:

> Far from being a one-sided process, the Hellenization of Christianity also
> involved theological assimilation and utilization of Greek philosophy.
> Throughout the Middle Age in Europe, theology was the protectress of phi-
> losophy. Natural reason had its justification as the counterpart of revelation.
> The discourse on faith and knowledge emerged from its spiritual cloister only
> following the anthropocentric turn spurred by humanism in the early modern
> period. The burden of proof was inverted once factual knowledge became
> autonomous and no longer had to justify its existence as secular knowledge:
> religion was brought before the bar of reason. With this, the philosophy of
> religion was born. [20]

The decline of Platonic dualism in European culture

Aristotelian naturalism and the scholastic discourse that stemmed from it were
constructed by diluting humanity with a cosmological conception where it appears
as an appendix to nature, without the capacity to influence the course of life on
earth. By conforming to the plan established by nature, or by God, he becomes a
moral being. He is first concerned by his biological reproduction in the context
of a patriarchal culture that punishes sexual desire outside marriage, to construct
a civilization on the postulate that humanity is the son of a man who appropri-
ates a woman, in one way or another, so that she provides him with descend-
ants to whom he transmits his name. In this philosophy, humanity belongs to
nature through biology, through blood, liable to fall into animality at any moment,
into original sin, if he does not obey the religious morality that saves him from
immorality. It is the role of religion to establish a boundary between humanity
and animality, a frontier guarded by the priest or imam who, as God's vicar on
earth, is a shepherd responsible for his flock of sheep, who risk straying and being
eaten by the wolf. The wolf, as it happens, represents instincts, carnal desires that
threaten the cosmological order of which religion is the guardian on earth. The
interpretation of sacred texts that merged with Greek philosophy taught that the
moral order willed by God is the continuation of the natural order incompatible
with the autonomy of the individual, which risks disrupting it. This world would
reach perfection if the Law were respected with the support of Reason and Faith.
By dissolving into these two concepts, the believer would ensure his/her eternal
salvation in the divine world of Essences and angels.

Is it a coincidence that Luther spoke out strongly against the metaphysics
taught by Thomas Aquinas? He accused Aristotle and his Christian disciples of

having deformed the faith of Jesus. "It is my advice", he writes, "that the books of Aristotle – *Physics, Metaphysics, The Soul,* and *Ethics* – which have hitherto been esteemed the best, be entirely removed from the curriculum, together with all others which boast that they teach natural science".[21] Luther criticized the use of reason when it comes to believing in God. His argument is strong, emphasizing that if we followed human reason, we would deduce either that God does not exist or that he is unjust. He writes:

> What now can reason dictate that is right when it is itself blind and ignorant? What can the will choose that is good when it is itself evil and worthless? Or rather, what choice has the will when reason dictates to it only the darkness of its own blind ignorance? With reason in error, then, and the will misdirected, what can man do or attempt that is good? … Consider, moreover, whether Paul himself is not citing the most outstanding among the Greeks when he says it was the wiser among them who became fools and whose minds were darkened, or who became futile in their reasoning … Tell me, does he not here touch the most sublime achievement of the Greeks – their reason? This means their best and loftiest ideas and opinions, which they regarded as solid wisdom.[22]

Commenting on Heidegger's work on Aristotle, the philosopher Philippe Büttgen notes that Luther "broke the thousand-year-old alliance of Christian speculation and Greek ontology which, according to Heidegger, would also impair the very possibility and 'original meaning' contained in each of the two experiences, Greek and Christian".[23] Borne through moral consciousness and not by an institution defending reason, Luther's idea of God accompanied the emerging modernity in Europe that discovered a new religiosity and transferred the God of heaven towards earth, in other words into the consciousness of believers. Submission to the Eternal was defined as an individual act and not a collective one, which is extended, on the one hand, by the freedom of consciousness and tolerance in society and, on the other, by the attributes of the subject of law in the state institutions. By bringing out consciousness, Protestantism helped the emergence of an individual autonomy that neutralized the influence of the Platonic paradigm on the daily life of believers. "With Luther", writes Habermas, "religious faith became reflective; the world of the divine was changed in the solitude of subjectivity into something posited by ourselves".[24]

By heralding a new worldview, Protestantism was a religious revolution that had profound consequences on European cultures, initiating the process of secularization that would modify the relationship between God and the believer. Unlike the Catholic of the Middle Ages, or a Muslim of today, the Protestant does not consider himself/herself to be in transit on earth, or a passing stranger waiting to reach his/her final destination. Admission to heaven or hell pertains to God's sovereign decision, and it would be blasphemous to wish to influence his decision. The radical character of this posture resides in the new doctrine of predestination,

opposed to the teachings of the Roman Church. "We call predestination", writes Calvin,

> God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition: rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death. [25]

From the perspective of Calvin, the believer loves God for who he is and not for what he promises. Saying to believers that, whatever he/she may do on earth, whether mortifying himself/herself or not, access to paradise is already decided by God before birth. Thus, the Protestant invests himself/herself on earth to accomplish his/her duties, far from sin, without pointless fervor and, above all, without considering God as a means to ensure one's happiness. It lessened the tension of Platonic dualism by asking the believer not to think of his/her future in the hereafter, because the question of salvation pertains to the attributes of God. The Protestant continues to believe that there is a hereafter, but he/she knows that going to paradise does not depend on him/her. This new conception of predestination liberates a social and psychological energy strong enough to motivate individuals to succeed on earth and to stop being obsessed with the hereafter. According to Max Weber, this state of mind creates "an elective affinity" between, on one side, a selfless puritan ethic in the relationship with God and, on the other side, success on earth, likely to be a divine portent.[26]

This new religious sensibility made God a familiar being, present in the human world. Whereas in the official doctrine of the Catholic Church and the Muslim ulema, God lives in the Platonic world of Ideas, of perfect Essences and of Intelligence, delegating his power on earth to omniscient and authoritarian personnel tasked with saving souls from being lost and preventing corrupting instincts from seizing bodies. Consequently, for Protestantism, time spent in temples worshiping God to save one's soul is wasted time. Rituals are not important, unlike the clergy would have one believe, using them to justify its existence by exploiting the naivety of the believers. By developing a new theology founded on grace and not on rituals, Luther diminished the tension of Platonic dualism by breaking the commercial relationship between God and the believer. This relationship is found in the entreaty: "Oh! God, assure me my place in heaven, and I will go to church to pray every day". With Luther, the believer loves God for who he is and not for the reward that he promises. Consequently, social life will be more tolerant, far from the tyranny of the public religion that devalues life on earth and exalts that of the hereafter. A spectacular change occurs psychologically: Humans no longer feel like strangers on earth, waiting to live in the hereafter. Plato's second world, that of the divine, becomes the hope of the believers and not a promise of the clergy. Luther replaced the religious theocentric paradigm with a religious anthropocentric one. In the former, the believer is guided by a priest, while he becomes his own priest in the latter. As Hegel put it, in the

first example, the master is outside the believer, while in the second, he is inside him.[27]

Protestantism was consistent with the new philosophy that emerged and defeated the old Greek metaphysics in the aftermath of Galileo's and Newton's discoveries. Its main feature is that it introduces the subjectivity through which the world's objectivity is grasped. If this new philosophy was radical, it is because Greek thought knew neither *I*, nor consciousness. Plato's and Aristotle's works, and their continuation in those of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, contain a physics – hence their rationality – driven by a mechanical logic, in which the flux comes from the Spirit, which the believer must revere to pay homage to God's power: The mirror image of the believer's powerlessness. In this cosmological vision, the individual is incapable of influencing the course of a world that would exist without him/her. Yet, in the emerging philosophy, which Descartes would initiate, and Kant would deepen, the only key to access the world is man, who became active in an *épistémé* of which he was unaware in the past. The peremptory and audacious sentence of Descartes' "I think therefore I am" affirms the intrusion of subjectivity and consciousness in a cosmological mechanism that was regular as clockwork. This phrase is a breach in the Platonic dualism that, for centuries, explained the world as consisting of two inseparable parts: Its essence and its appearance. Built on these two concepts, scholasticism was unaware of the concept of consciousness that it did not need.[28] Reason sufficed to regulate a mechanical world powered by divine forces. For the Greeks, disincarnated, mythologized reason was set forth to conquer the real world, by overcoming the obstacles erected by the nature of things, based on "this fundamental ontological theory in which the structure of the universe is independent from the knowing subject".[29] In Greek thought, the objectivity of the world is known through the demonstrative speculation of the prime cause that ignores human consciousness. Neither religious knowledge, nor the Greek philosophy that influenced it, give weight to consciousness, preferring the category of reason, which Aristotle would say is the essence of man. In Platonic dualism, there is no place for consciousness; reason is sufficient to distinguish the hidden Essences. It is only with Descartes that philosophy realized that a human is a consciousness, and with Marx that consciousness is often false.

In Greek philosophy, there are beings, but there are not human beings; there is the subject of knowledge but not any knowing subject. The philosopher Georges Canguilhem expresses his astonishment when observing that the Greek philosophers ignored psychology, even though it etymologically signifies the science of the soul. He writes: "It is remarkable that an independent psychology is missing, in both idea and fact, from the philosophical systems of antiquity where the psyche, or soul, is taken to be a natural being".[30] It is precisely because it is held to be a natural organ, driven by the heart and senses, that the soul is foreign to what would later be called consciousness. In his book *On the Soul*, Aristotle links it to biology, the branch of physics that studies the movements of the human body. In this approach, nature absorbs man, a social animal, whose immediate relationship with the world is constructed through the senses (sight, hearing,

etc.). However, for Plato, these senses need reason to correct the errors that they engender. Thus, in this paradigm, the absolute objectivity of the world is an ontological element that does not depend, in any way, on man. Paradoxically, "those truly responsible for the advent of modern psychology as science of the thinking subject are the mechanical physicists of the 17th century", states G. Canguilhem.[31] He explained that if science was constructed against the illusions of sensible experience, this signifies that reality is falsified by a falsifying spirit, which a new discipline, psychology, would try to understand. Psychology seeks to know why "the spirit is by nature compelled to mislead reason regarding reality". [32]

This is how the way was paved for the philosophical concepts of "being in itself" and "being for oneself", establishing that humans are first and foremost consciousness, of which the Greek philosophers were not aware. Their metaphysics was adopted by the theologies of monotheism, who found in it the rational demonstration of divine power that constructed the objectivity of the world in which humans hold a special place in the animal kingdom. Neither the medieval interpretation of monotheism, nor Greek thought knew the concept of a subject equipped with a consciousness, who grasped the world through their subjectivity. It was in the context of the weakening Greek metaphysics that Descartes appeared, introducing the *I* that disrupted the worldview where a human was an inert organic element faced with the majestic and active sovereignty of the Creator, of the First Mover, of the Intellect, etc. Karl Jaspers would speak, with the relevance of an axial change in the history of humanity, of the dimension of the apparition of agriculture in the Neolithic age.[33]

The Cartesian *I* heralded the dismantlement of Greek metaphysics and the birth of a new philosophy structured around concepts that expressed a change in paradigm and *épistémé*: Immanence, consciousness, moral freedom, subject of law; these are concepts foreign to Greek thought and which would be opposed to the idolatry of symbols and clerical meditation. A new philosophical sensibility would be established, replacing Greek metaphysics, culminating in Kant's thought that praises moral conduct in society. Kant calls for the respect of categorical imperatives of universal scope regarding worshiping: "Apart from moral conduct, all that man thinks himself able to do, in order to become acceptable to God, is mere superstition and religious folly".[34] With Kant, faith is linked to the practical reason that should regulate human interactions; it should be present in every moment of daily life and not only on Sundays in a church. God requires the believer's sincerity in every moment of his life, as if all of the earth was a church. Public seasonal devotion then becomes superfluous.[35] Hegel, Kant's disciple, agrees and states that "Luther gave his Reform the objective of bringing the Church back to its original purity, to the form that it had in the first centuries".[36] This is the shift in perspective by which the believer integrates a world that was, up to this point, exterior to his subjectivity. God is no longer embodied in politico-institutional symbolism and instead embeds himself in consciousness, which then transfers transcendence – transformed into immanence and borne through subjectivity – towards the earth.

The religious wars, which ravaged Europe for three centuries and resulted in several hundreds of thousands of deaths, had at stake this new relationship with God, borne by an active subject expressing a metaphysical meaning of existence. A new conception of the world was established in keeping with the social and psychological upheavals in the believers' behavior. By putting God into the subject's consciousness, Protestantism gave more importance to life on earth. The past theologians believed in the afterlife and not in life and did not perceive the subjective dimension of relationships between God and humanity, between the idea of God and the socio-psychological structure of faith. Above all, with the birth of capitalism, the risk that faith would become a symbolic good subjected to the logic of monetary exchange became real. Protestantism began with the revolt against the Indulgences, the certificates sold by the Church to enter heaven. It is certainly not by chance that Protestantism appeared with the early days of capitalism, the collapse of scholasticism, and the birth of modern philosophy, which would dismantle the Platonic metaphysics expelled from secular thought and limited to theology. The events that imposed this change, states Habermas, are the Protestant Reform, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution, giving Luther an inaugural role.

Nietzsche and the Platonic paradigm

Nietzsche is the philosopher who best expressed the end of Greek metaphysics and of its link with monotheism. He explicitly attacked Plato's philosophy, which idealizes heaven according to him and devalues earthly life by making humans sad. "For Plato", he writes,

> life has a metaphysical signification that transcends happiness on this earth … The present life is only half real, the body is a prison and chain for the soul, yes! The tomb of the soul. The sensible is attached to the soul like algae and barnacles to a rock … The myths of the *Republic*, *Phaedo*, and *Gorgias* reveal the retribution in the hereafter.[37]

On this chimera, monotheism was interpreted by privileging the mystical dimension that neither brought happiness to the believer on earth nor relieved his/her sufferings. On the contrary, the triumphant religion became a dogma that altered the purity of the first prophets' message. For Nietzsche, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam moved away from their first message when they became the property of an élite, exercising a monopoly over the interpretation of sacred texts. Becoming desiccated dogmas that are reproduced in forms of worship that are closer to magic than spirituality, the religions turned away from what is human by creating the myth of sainthood, establishing a rupture in humankind between individuals close to God and individuals far from God. This division contradicts the universality of the religious message disfigured, in Christianity, by the clergy, which presented itself as the intermediary between this world and the hereafter.

This assault on the "professionals of the sacred" especially targets the Greek metaphysics that gave intellectual legitimacy to monotheism that deviated from its spiritual mission. The Church transformed it into a faith that gave God the image of a vengeful righter of wrongs, pursuing the sinners. "Let us not be ungrateful to it", writes Nietzsche,

> even though it certainly has to be admitted that the worse, the most wearisomely protracted and the most dangerous of all errors hitherto has been a dogmatist's error, namely Plato's invention of pure spirit and the good in itself … In fact, as physicians we could ask: "How could such a disease infect Plato, the most beautiful outgrowth of antiquity? Did the evil Socrates corrupt him after all?" … But the struggle against the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia – since Christianity is Platonism for the "people" – has created a magnificent tension of spirit in Europe, the likes of which the earth has never known, with such a tension in our bow we can now shoot at the furthest goals.[38]

Nietzsche particularly criticizes Platonism for altering the psychology of humans who, instinctively, submit themselves to an eschatological fear that founds an illusory remedy in religiosity. This illusion had real effects and weighed on history by diverting considerable energy towards futile dreams. It did not enchant the world and did not spread the promised fraternity; on the contrary, it made life sad and motivated the believer to take pleasure from battlefields, in which he believed Good was triumphing over Evil when killing his fellow men. Religiosity for Nietzsche is the opposite of spirituality; it suspects happiness on earth to be illegitimate as though it was stolen from the hereafter. It teaches that one cannot love and be happy on earth. As happiness is not from this world, it is then assimilated with a pleasure that was, with Adam and Eve, behind the sin founding Christian morality. Thus, a culture of deprivation was established, in which God's love is incompatible with earthy pleasure beginning with sexual pleasure.

Nietzsche challenges the Platonic vision of the world that creates existential angst among believers. They are asked to orient their hopes towards the hereafter, where they will be happy in the future among the angels. For Nietzsche, the religiosity derived from Plato is a remedy for the genuine evil of which it is the cause. Belonging to a Protestant milieu, Nietzsche devalues the religious rituals through which the believer hopes to acquire a place in heaven. Nietzsche's nihilism proclaims the death of Plato, of the Church and of God: The one with whom the believer haggles for a place in the hereafter, the one to whom the religious imagination gave a role of righter of wrongs and supreme judge in heaven. The image of the vengeful God, the accountant God, the commercial God is dead following the Church's infantilizing discourse. With these provocative words, Nietzsche lays into the religiosity that killed God, that of magic rituals, of totems, and fetishes. The narrow mind of the professionals of the sacred (rabbis, priests, imams) imprisoned God in idols and incantatory formulas that made him inert, lifeless, and without breath. The God of the rabbis, of the pope

and ulema, who portray him as a vengeful policeman, is dead, but not the one of hope, of consciousness. Nietzsche is not a declared atheist; he is a critic of the religiosity that dehumanized the world and forged an image of God contrary to Kindness and Mercy. By opposing religiosity to spirituality, by declaring that the church deformed the prophets' message, Nietzsche indicates that he does not deny the divine experience linked to human existence. The death of God signifies the disappearance of the idol God; the totemic God has to leave his place to the God of consciousness, the immanent God. Nietzsche has been misunderstood by those who accused him of lacking any morality. There is in his writings a deep humanism that seeks to free men from false beliefs and idols. He saw in humanity a potential that the fear of the afterlife had quelled and directed towards sadness and misfortune. His concept of superman is explained in the following passage:

> Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman – a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping. What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an *overture* and a going under. [39]

Nietzsche's philosophy invites one to accept the world as it is and to make it a more welcoming place. His message can be translated by the will to bring an end to the angst of the believer who fears all his life not to be able to join the kingdom of heaven. For Nietzsche, it is not as much a case of a human going to the hereafter after death as making God live on earth during the believer's existence. He is against religiosities that are emptied of their humanist substance; he is not against hope and the experience of happiness. However, he draws attention to an illusion that tormented humanity over thousands of years – the illusion according to which the world is false, corrupt and hateful – and to the existence of a real world that must be constructed in its place. "The Christian resolution to find the world ugly and bad has made the world ugly and bad".[40] History is marked by this creed that makes us believe that we live in a false world, made of appearances, and that only the mystic – or today's savant – has the secret of the real world, the one to which we all aspire, the one where error and falsehood are non-existent. These priests and savants are charlatans who sell myths by exploiting people's credulity. There is only one world, the one in which we live with our false beliefs, our hopes, our illusions and our fears, which are the substance of our humanity. For Nietzsche, the problem is not just limited to religion; it is also of a metaphysical order and is linked to humanity's cognitive demand met by metaphysics. He strongly emphasizes the complicit relationship between religion and science that has existed. He writes:

> The belief on which our faith in science is based has remained to this day a metaphysical belief, even we knowers of today, we godless foes of metaphysics, we too take our fire from that conflagration which was kindled by a

thousand-year-faith, from that Christian belief, which is also Plato's belief, the belief that God is truth, that truth is divine. [41]

Nietzsche was among those who drew attention to the utopia that sought to reach the real world of the savant or the mystic. He pointed out that the world of error is the *real* human world and that it would be an illusion to want to replace it. He writes:

> Our organs, which serve life, are made for error … Life is the condition of knowledge. Error is the condition of life, I mean to say the fundamental error … We must love and cultivate error: for it is the matrix of knowledge … If it is true that we live by virtue of error, what then is the "will to know"? Should it not be the "will to die"?[42]

Should one and can one know everything? Is it not vital for us to be unaware of some aspects of our existence? Our life is only possible because within us there is a mechanism that produces salutary errors and that suppresses, in the form of unconscious forgetting, truths that we would find unbearable. The real world that religion promised us, and that science promises us today, will it one day exist? Can it possibly exist? About two decades earlier, this epistemic, lucid, and welcoming nihilism announced the birth of psychoanalysis.

Nietzsche shows the futility of reason's struggle to explain, and even more to construct, the presupposed *real world* of the new human who would perceive the world in its Essence, in his *objective reality*, after having made the supposed false representations, ideologies, and ignorance disappear. What Nietzsche denounces is the utopian desire that has haunted humanity since Plato to eradicate the error. Life is part of the false world that is real and, what is most serious, is that there is no supposed real alternative to this false world. Nietzsche explains that Plato's cave is not the place of the illusion; it is certainly a world of false images and false opinions, but this falsity is real and does not have a supposed real alternative. A new belief that provides a feeling of liberation will always replace an older one, experienced as a brake on fulfillment. We believe that we are liberating ourselves from a habitus that has become restrictive, just to replace it with another so transparent that we cannot sense it, while the next generation will seek to get rid of it because it will seem cumbersome. Humankind's freedom knows no bounds, and if this were otherwise, history would have an ending.

By seeking to construct a real world, the ideologues, whether they be religious, secularized or scientists, participate in the reproduction of the false world and, most often, distance it from what it should be: A peaceful and human world. They destroy the only real world that humanity has, and install themselves in the illusion of unique truth, making them hate this world by pushing themselves to worship a virtual world in the place of the real one. Yesterday religion, and today the so-called science, encourage him to chase an illusion, turning him away from himself and refusing to let him admit what he is, namely a consciousness. It took centuries to realize that the real world is the one of consciousness condemned

to be false. The idea of a real world is a belief produced by false consciousness. Marxism failed because its main goal was to construct a social order based on real consciousness. It wanted to dispel the false consciousness to replace it with real consciousness: It led towards the gulag. Marxist philosophy, one of the greatest intellectual conquests of the 19th century, resulted in totalitarianism when it taught that humanity could live with a *real consciousness*. Nietzsche drew attention to the murderous rampages of utopias that killed millions of men, regardless of whether these utopias were religious or secular, but his words were not heeded. Nietzsche denounces religious eschatology, which teaches that reality and real life are in the hereafter, as much as scientific positivism that promises to make ignorance disappear and to construct a transparent world in the near future.

These two promises, says Nietzsche, impair the psychological balance of the individual, whose need to know is as important as his need to ignore. On this subject, Nietzsche's reflection is fundamental when he explains that life is impossible without mystery, without fear, without angst and, consequently, without ignorance. He is not an apologist for obscurantism; he simply draws attention to the mysterious elements of life and death, the affective nature of humanity and the necessity of the ideological dimension of social life. These three aspects – *the* mystery of life and death, individual affectivity, and group ideology – are not foreign to the cognitive process, because knowledge is a state of mind and a mental construction of what we want to know. It does not put an end to ignorance but to the feeling of ignorance. It does not stem from a better intelligence of the world but rather from a mental predisposition and, from this postulate, reality is a fact of consciousness and not uniquely a discovery made by reason. With consciousness, humanity rediscovers itself on earth, reconciles with itself, abandoning the fool's dream of tearing away the veil of ignorance to discover the reality of things. Despite its flaws, fears, and angst, consciousness is peaceful when free from naturally bellicose reason. Indeed, reason is always at war: Against error, against the irrationality of others, against reality when it does not match our expectations. If the religious spirit was led astray, it is because reason seized it to provide a psychological motivation to the bellicose tendency of man. Religion only reconciles with its primary objectives if it abandons reason to become one with consciousness. This is the challenge that Muslim society faces. There is an urgent need for Muslims to understand this to give the Qurʾan back its humanist content, lost over centuries of sterile devotion and deadly religiosity.

Is Nietzsche's discourse relevant for Muslims seeking modernity? It is, insofar as Muslim theology is rooted in the Platonic paradigm. The ulema will refute him and accuse him of being the *dejjal*, a forewarning of the end of the world or the triumph of barbarity that aims to do away with God, in other words the victory of the imperfect world over the perfect world. He will have opponents because he challenges a worldview that has fossilized and that fossilized the Qurʾan. Nietzsche does not only criticize dogmatic religious behavior, he also criticizes the cultural vision that forms the basis of the behavior, which he says has distanced itself from the humanist message of the prophets. What Nietzsche perceived is that religion and culture (as a worldview) go hand in hand. The first refers to moral duty

and consciousness, while the second provides the cognitive framework in which moral action takes place. If religion is experienced in a decaying culture and can no longer rationally respond to metaphysical questions, it will be immobilized in dogmas that will lose their human substance. Theology then becomes meaningless and dull rhetoric, cutting itself off from the progress of human thought that enriches culture. This is what happened to Muslim societies that have not had any great theologians or philosophers for centuries, after having known al-Ashʿari, Ibn Sina, al-Farabi, al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd. When learned culture is immobilized, popular beliefs are dehumanized and start to worship symbols that lost the very sense of the realities that gave rise to them. "My community will need reform every one hundred years", the Prophet foretold. If this hadith is not apocryphal, it means that Muslim societies have missed 14 reforms. The last attempt made by the Nahda in the 19th century failed to modernize theology. Everyone needs to read Nietzsche to put some humanity back into religion to return to God; the one of consciousness and not one of instincts and love of self. Reading Nietzsche makes us aware of Muslim culture's necessity of a new metaphysics, different from Plato's.[43]

Nietzsche's philosophy completed in European culture the shift from the theocentric order to the anthropocentric one. What prevents Muslim culture from experiencing this shift? Actually, in Islam, there is neither complete theocentrism, nor complete anthropocentrism; it is blocked in the middle of these two paradigms probably because the Qurʾan is more consistent with Plato's philosophy than the Gospels, as I will try to show in the following chapter.

Notes

1 Jean Pierre Vernant, *Religion, histoire, raison*, Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1979, p. 58.
2 K. Jaspers**,** *Way to Wisdom, An Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. Ralph Manheim, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1954, p. 39.This same author has a theory in which the Mediterranean area experienced an Axial Age from 800–200 B.C. during which the worldview corresponding to Abrahamic monotheism was forged.
3 Hermann Cohen, *La religion dans les limites de la philosophie*, trans. M. B. de Launay and C. Prompsy, Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1990, p. 20.
4 Idem.
5 Justin, *Apologie*, I, 46, 3, Wartelle, cited by Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique*?, Paris: Gallimard, 1995, p. 361.
6 Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Robin Waterfield, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 29.
7 The Qurʾan takes up the biblical narration of the original sin committed by Adam and Eve but, unlike in Christianity, it affirms that God pardoned them and, consequently, their descendants would bear no burden related to this sin. This does not prevent Muslims from living their religion as a "debt" to be paid to God. In Arabic language, religion and debt are often confused by popular Islam due to the proximity of the two words: *Deen* and *dayne*
8 Martin Heidegger, *Supplements: From the Earliest Essays to Being and Time and Beyond*, Ed. John van Buren, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002, p. 125.
9 Plotin, *Enneads, London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1969, II*, 2.1, pp. 15–16

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